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Respectfully,

H. W. WILEY, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., *Chairman*.

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#### PROPOSED SYLVESTER MEMORIAL.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE—May I be permitted to appeal through your columns to all friends and admirers of the late Professor J. J. Sylvester to assist in founding a suitable memorial in honor of his name and for the encouragement of mathematical science. A movement was inaugurated on this side of the Atlantic soon after his death, and it was resolved by the promoters that a fund should be raised for

the purpose of establishing a Sylvester Medal, to be awarded at certain intervals for mathematical research to any worker irrespective of nationality. For the purpose of carrying out the scheme, a strongly representative International Committee has been formed, and I should like to take advantage of this opportunity of expressing the great satisfaction which it has given to the promoters to be enabled to include in this Committee so many great and distinguished names from the American universities. In every case our invitation to join the Committee has been most cordially responded to, and the consent has in many instances been accompanied by expressions of the greatest sympathy and encouragement. The list as it stands practically includes the leading mathematicians of the whole world.

It has been estimated that a capital sum of \$5,000 will be sufficient for the proposed endowment, and of this about one-half has already been subscribed here. In appealing to the American public to enable us to complete the desired sum I am in the first place prompted by the consideration that Sylvester's association with the Johns Hopkins University and the leading part which he took in advancing mathematical science in America renders his claim to estimation on the part of the citizens of your country quite a special one. It is but a modest endowment that we are asking for, and I am sure that all those who were personally acquainted with him and who realize the great influence which he exerted in raising the intellectual level of every institution with which he was associated will be glad of this opportunity of coöperating in the movement.

It is proposed that the fund when complete shall be transferred to the Council of the Royal Society of London, that body having undertaken to accept the trust and to award the medal triennially to mathematicians of all countries. I can hardly venture to trespass upon your courtesy to the extent of asking you to print the complete list of our Committee, but for your own information I beg to send a copy herewith. It will be sufficient to state that it comprises the names of President Gilman, of the Johns Hopkins University; of Professor Simon Newcomb, of Washington; of Professor Willard Gibbs, of Yale; of Professor Pierce,

Harvard, and many other well known American men of science. Subscriptions may be sent to and will be acknowledged by Dr. Cyrus Adler, the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, or by Dr. George Bruce Halsted, President of the Texas Academy of Science, 2407 Guadalupe street, Austin, Texas.

RAPHAEL MELDOLA,  
*Hon. Organizing Secretary.*  
TECHNICAL COLLEGE, LONDON, ENGLAND,  
December, 1897.

#### TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In my book on 'Travel and Transportation,' published in the *Smithsonian Report* for 1894, pages 280 and 281, will be found pictures of the only climbing device ever reported to have been used by an American Indian. At the time of describing this apparatus I had no information as to the manner of its use. During the last summer Doctor Franz Boas made a journey among the Bella Coola Indians, British Columbia, and saw the apparatus employed in climbing. It is also used by the Tlingit and other tribes as far south as Vancouver Island.

The wooden portion figured in the *Report* is not a boatswain's chair, but a foot-rest; the soft, flat portion is for use around the upper part of the back of the climber, under his arms. This combination is necessary in the Northwest country because the trees are not altogether devoid of limbs and knots; therefore, at certain points on the tree, the climber must unship his apparatus in order to pass the obstruction. My figures show that both parts of the device have loops so that the rope may be withdrawn at any time. The climber connects the upper half with the lower half of the apparatus by means of lines. When he arrives at a limb he draws his foot-board up as high as possible; then resting his body on this he readjusts the upper portion, sustaining his back above the obstruction, and moves upward as far as he can reach. Then, hanging himself in this, he is able to draw up and readjust his foot-board and make fast again after the manner of the inch worm.

The specific difference between this device and any other with which the writer is acquainted is in this facility of readjustment on

account of knots and limbs by means of the connecting lines between the upper and lower half of the apparatus as explained by Doctor Boas.

O. T. MASON.

#### 'TIME WASTED.'

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: Apropos the article in your last issue 'Time Wasted,' a professor in a reputable theological seminary in the West lately informed me that the astronomers were now convinced the end of the world was imminent. To substantiate his statement he showed me an article in a religious paper, *The Prophetic News and Israel's Watchman*, where such a prediction was made on the strength of some utterances from "Professor S. J. Carrigan, Director of the Carleton University, Northfield, Minnesota, the great university of the Northwest of America." Professor Carrigan is spoken of as having written an article in '*Popular Astronomy*, the recognized organ of American astronomy' on the subject, and he is said to have 'discovered the existence of three hitherto unknown planets, which are *tearing through space* between our earth and the sun.' The following extracts are then made from his article: "This new planet (one in the process of evolution from the sun) may at any instant break away from the sun, and the terrific explosion which will necessarily accompany this breaking away will produce a great disturbance of the entire universe, but particularly of the earth, perhaps completely smashing it, and surely destroying all animal life on land as well as in the waters." "Neither is this tremendous disturbance of the earth and *the destruction of all life* upon it completely unprecedented. A similar detachment of solar matter by the same means is known by the scientists to have occurred twenty-three million years ago, a period simultaneous with the Paleozoic age, at which time all animal and vegetable life then existing on the face of the earth was crushed out." "The results of my investigations on this subject indicate that the earth is closely approaching a critical epoch. These results convince me that it is imminent."

An account of the etiology of these peculiar products of journalism would be of interest.

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